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AUTHOR	Margulus, Lisabeth S.; Price, William J.; Tracy, Jaclynn C.
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ABSTRACT

As educational indicators continue to signal tough times ahead, higher education institutions are also likely to continue to face further belt tightening. This means operating more efficiently and will also require that institutions look for opportunities to collaborate through inter-institutional partnerships that provide creative ways to address program needs in high demand fields. The Cooperative doctoral program in educational leadership of Eastern Michigan University (EMU) and Grand Valley State University (GVSU) is an example of the sort of collaboration that can avoid costly duplication of programs while serving student needs in a high demand area. A unique interinstitutional program was formed in 1998 to deliver EMU's program at the GVSU campus. The program uses GVSU facilities, marketing, and staff support, as well as collaboration between EMU and GVSU faculty through teaching and service on doctoral dissertations. Residual benefits include interinstitutional collaboration between faculty and increased benefits for students who have access to a wider range of faculty expertise and institutional facilities and resources in an era of severe fiscal constraint. (Contains 11 references.) (SLD)

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An Inter-Institutional Partnership for a Doctoral Program in an Era of Financial Constraint

by

Lisabeth S. Margulus, Ed.D.
Assistant Professor, School of Education
Grand Valley State University

William J. Price, Ph.D.
Professor, Educational Leadership
Eastern Michigan University

Jaclynn C. Tracy, Ph.D.
Professor, Educational Leadership
Eastern Michigan University

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Introduction

Public universities across the country are facing difficult times. A continued sluggish economy has forced states to make major cutbacks in state essential services including support for higher education. Recent estimates note that states are facing a collective deficit of between 60 and 80 billion dollars as we near the beginning of the 2004 fiscal year. As a result state legislatures have made major reductions in their traditional annual appropriations to state universities as they struggle to comply with constitutional or legislative mandates to balance their budgets and eliminate deficits.

In addition, university endowments have also taken large hits as low interest rates and a soft investment market have combined to dramatically reduce important university revenues. As a result of lower state appropriations, loss of endowment earnings, and record numbers of student enrollments, universities have been forced to shift a greater share of the financial burden to student tuition and fees. In a survey released in February, 2003, by the National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education, from year 2002 to 2003 average yearly tuition costs for four year public colleges increased by 10% and similar increases are expected for 2003-2004. As the tuition and fee's impact on students rises to dangerously high levels, it raises serious questions about access and affordability, particularly to students from low income families.

In the face of this financial gloom, universities will do well to continue existing programs. "Budget cuts are forcing institutions to curb proposed expansions of their academic programs, especially at the graduate level…", (Arnone, Hiebal & Schmidt, 2003, p. 1). The development and marketing of new programs to address emerging needs

is not very likely to occur at most state universities. Accordingly, universities within the same state should be looking for opportunities to collaborate on shared programs, resources and staff.

While some critics of state higher education systems have suggested that more mergers between institutions will or should occur, others suggest that such a prediction is misguided. In an insightful article in The Chronicle of Higher Education, Martin and Samels, (May 17, 2002), predict that strategic alliances will out number mergers by a factor of more than 20 to 1. They define a strategic alliance as a "fluid, temporary, focused set of understandings and covenants between two or more complementary learning institutions". Such agreements, they point out, "can maintain the unique identities of both institutions while combining their respective strengths to take advantage of market opportunities --- and need only to form such a partnership for the period that the educational program is effective and in high demand"(p.1). When such market forces and demands shift, the partnership can either be dissolved or reshaped.

One such example of inter-institutional cooperation is occuring within the state of Michigan. Two state universities, Eastern Michigan University (EMU) in the southeast quadrant of the state, and Grand Valley State University (GVSU) serving the southwest quadrant of the state have entered into a successful partnership to deliver a high quality doctoral program in educational leadership. The state of Michigan has 15 publically supported state universities that are essentially autonomous in their governance structure. With no state master plan for higher education governance, these institutions compete with one another for programs, often with unnecessary duplication and in-efficient use of scarce tax dollars.

Grand Valley State University has a graduate program in educational leadership but it is not a doctoral degree granting institution and currently has no plans to become one. This is due in part to the increased costs associated with doctoral programs and with the concern that such programs might diminish support for their outstanding undergraduate programs. With a strong doctoral program in educational leadership already in existence at EMU, a unique inter-institutional partnership was forged in 1998 to deliver EMU's program at the GVSU campus. The initial agreement called for four cohorts of doctoral students from GVSU, one new cohort every other year. EMU is now midway through the third GVSU cohort and both institutions will consider extending the partnership if the need continues to exist. The partnership utilizes GVSU facilities, marketing and staff support, as well as collaboration between EMU/GVSU faculty through teaching and service on doctoral dissertation committees.

The Value of Faculty Collaboration in the Delivery of a Cooperative Doctoral Program

Over the past century, faculty collaboration has grown significantly. More than ever before professors are teaching, conducting research studies, and writing together. Austin and Baldwin (1991) wrote that faculty collaboration is a cooperative endeavor that involves common goals, coordinated effort, and outcomes or products for which participants share responsibility and credit.

Professors choose to collaborate for various reasons. Collaboration increases productivity while maximizing resources; it stimulates creativity by enabling professors to share their ideas and aspirations; it enhances the quality of their teaching and their research; and it provides an environment for mentoring and role modeling.

In higher education there are two principle forms of collaboration: in teaching and in research. In both forms there are key steps in the collaboration process: 1.) choosing colleagues or team members, 2) dividing the work, 3) establishing quality expectations and timelines, and 4) ending the collaboration. (Austin and Baldwin) If the cooperative relationship is successful, academic life for the professors and their institutions should be enriched. Therefore, it is mandatory that the academic institutions support the collaboration through recognition and rewards in public and private ways. They should promote teamwork by writing policies and creating organizational structures to encourage more individuals within the institution to work together. They should allocate discretionary resources to support such efforts. Finally, they should break down the barriers that discourage collaboration by faculty, such as encouraging collaborative authorships of publications instead of valuing more individual authorships.

As GVSU is a non-doctoral granting institution, the majority of its School of Education faculty members have not had the experience of serving on a dissertation committee. The work is highly specialized and important, and it is crucial for the professors to be well informed of the expectations and practices involved in a faculty member's participation in the dissertation process.

The EMU faculty serve as mentors to the GVSU faculty in this process. In this collaborative doctoral program GVSU faculty must participate as members, not Chairs, of every dissertation committee. The EMU faculty has provided guidelines to the GVSU faculty regarding expectations, skills and abilities that are required from a faculty member's perspective.

When members of a faculty in a graduate education program agree to serve on a dissertation committee, they assume a dual responsibility of great importance. One part is service to the student, and the other part is service to the discipline and professional field to which the dissertation is related.

The relationship is reciprocal, however, in that the faculty member also benefits from the experience. Serving on a dissertation committee provides an excellent scholarship and professional growth opportunity, especially for new faculty members or faculty from non-doctoral granting institutions, such as Grand Valley State University.

Research shows that dissertation committee members should have specific characteristics if they are truly to be assets to the doctoral candidate. (Hernandez, 1996)

- They should all hold doctorates; demonstrate active involvement in the topic area; be flexible, dedicated and collaborative; and know how to motivate students.
- They should be selected based on their knowledge of the content, theory, measurement, and analysis relevant to the topic, as well as be able to complement the dissertation committee chair's expertise and background.
- They should be available to advise the student and be attentive to the student throughout the dissertation process, as well as guide the student's professional development. (For example, if there is concern about a student's progress, the student should receive in writing a clear explanation of the deficiencies and what is necessary to remedy the situation.)
- They should be able to provide specific targets and timelines within the process for students to meet, as well as be able to implement mechanisms for regular reporting of progress by the candidate to the committee. Also, they should be able

to formulate and implement a clear system of reviewing each student's progress, at least annually.

- They should have the time to review the dissertation proposal and examine the student on the content, feasibility, and his/her understanding of the proposal prior to the commencement of the dissertation research, and be able to provide critical feedback as needed at key stages of the work..
- Upon the completion of the dissertation, they should be able to review the written dissertation and be available to attend the public presentation of the dissertation research.

Walden University's Dissertation Guidelines (Walden University, 2003) clearly articulate standards that should be addressed in the doctoral process. These guidelines serve to assist students and dissertation committees in fairly implementing the process. The dissertation committee should thoroughly review:

- The problem statement, conceptualize the research issues and specify the breadth and magnitude of the literature review. (The committee's feedback may include accurately focusing on the issue, identifying all variables and potential relationships, and making the research intent clear.)
- The student's proposed research design.
- The selection of specific methodology with respect to the research question.
- The implementation of the research methodology.
- The data collection and analysis, presentation of the data, statistical analyses, and the conclusions that are drawn from the analysis.

- The critical thinking by the student, including a discussion of how the research outcomes may affect change.

Through the successful completion of this process with guidance from experienced faculty members, inexperienced faculty members will improve their own skills in defining and clarifying a research problem; in conducting a comprehensive literature review that contains primary sources of theories, concepts, principles and models in the field; in creating a fully described and justified research design; in analyzing and interpreting data presented; and in evaluating the conclusions and recommendations made to be of value to the current body of literature on the topic.

With every dissertation committee experience, new faculty members will gain confidence in their abilities to help students through the doctoral program process, as well as learn much about new research and issues within their own areas of expertise.

Undoubtedly, the collaborative faculty relationship described in this EMU/GVSU doctoral program provided a structure and facilitated a new learning opportunity for the GVSU faculty. However, this mentor-mentee relationship will ultimately enhance all of the professors' instruction in their own classes. Ultimately students at both institutions will benefit!

Cooperative Doctoral Programming – Benefits to Students

Another important dimension of cooperative doctoral programming is the benefits afforded to the students admitted into the program. Advantages for doctoral students include access to faculty expertise and support at both partnership institutions, student engagement in a doctoral cohort structure experience, the opportunity to participate in

non-traditional delivery formats for instruction and access to the facilities and resources of both educational institutions.

By partnering with another institution to deliver coursework and engage in the doctoral dissertation process students have significantly increased the opportunity and variety of faculty/student interaction available to them. In the case of the EMU/GVSU partnership both universities have rich histories and expertise in teaching, scholarship and service in the education profession, all of which are accessible to the inquiring and developing doctoral student.

By delivering the doctoral program in an off campus location the degree granting institution has the opportunity to offer a student cohort structured experience. In the past decade, the research conducted on the cohort structure delivery model has been very positive for students and the institution extending this opportunity (Dorn & Papalewis, 1995, Miller & Irby, 1999). Basom, Yerkes, Norris, and Barnett (1995) suggest that "to view cohorts simply as a method of course delivery, as a vehicle for socialization, as a convenient scheduling design, or as a fashionable approach to program delivery is to do the cohort structure great injustice". Teital (1995) reports in his study of the University of Massachusetts – Boston leadership doctoral program that gains in support and connection among the students are to be expected but,

> Other impacts, that were somewhat less anticipated [in this study of doctoral cohorts] included a change in the depth of discussion in cohort classes, especially about sensitive issues like race; changes in interpersonal relationships among students; changes in power relationships

between students and faculty in classes; and changes in program planning and decision-making dynamics"(p.76).

Anecdotal evidence that further supports these assertions has also been gathered in the EMU/GVSU cohort delivery experience and has been found very useful in on-going structural and organizational planning.

Beginning in the mid 1900's preferences toward the use of non-traditional packaged course options for instruction were cited in the literature. Working professionals find condensed formats that include weekend and summer delivery the most convenient instructional blend for their demanding job and family responsibilities. They also provide the structure for students and faculty to engage in the rich, deep discussions, that educational leaders need as they make the very important connections between theory, practice and their own development as leaders.

Although the use of technology in the delivery of all instructional models is increasing it is particularly useful for off campus partnership doctoral programs. On-line delivery, computer-assisted instruction, and hyrid courses all enhance the institution's ability to serve students at a distance. An e-learning environment can enrich the classroom experience while increasing the flexibility of the program itself. The core of the program is the classroom with enhancements coming through Internet-based access to resources and computer mediated communication.

Doctoral students participating in a collaborative program also have the benefit of access to the facilities and resources of both institutions. Staff expertise and library facilities are the most commonly used resources. Access to these resources greatly

enhance the student's exposure to the extensive body of knowledge available through these two institutions of higher education.

Challenges to Maintaining a Partnership

While the benefits of higher education partnerships are many, there are also challenges to maintaining these partnerships. These challenges center on scheduling, communications, relationship building and breaking down bureaucratic barriers for students.

Scheduling coursework, committee meetings for comprehensive qualifying examinations, proposal reviews and defense activity all present interesting sets of challenges. Electronic communications have gone a long way toward addressing these issues and allow opportunities to ferret out the most effective and efficient vehicles for meeting this challenge – as long as all parties involved are users of these venues. Whatever the selected venue, administrators and faculty in these programs must quickly define the most strategic way to address these challenges.

Communication with the students participating in the cooperative doctoral program is essential in maintaining a successful partnership also. Planned, orchestrated exposure of the doctoral faculty to the students is critical. This exposure provides the opportunity for the students to learn about the research interests of the faculty and their approach to the research protocol and process. This is accomplished by distributing the doctoral coursework among the faculty ranks and by each individual faculty member aiding

students in the selection of their faculty mentors throughout the program. For example, one of the first courses that students in the EMU/GVSU cooperative doctoral program engage in is the advanced seminar. As a part of this course, the faculty member of record posts research and writings of other faculty members on the web and further invites the faculty member to present at class.

Other vehicles that enhance faculty/student/staff communications might include monthly newsletters which are sent to all doctoral students and graduates, the creation of the doctoral student listserv, and annual drive-in conferences. These avenues will differ based upon the needs and interests of the faculty and students but, in any case, need to be considered as program administrators strive to nurture and support the partnership and enhance communication among students, faculty, staff and graduates of the program.

Relationship building with partner faculties in both the concentration and cognate related areas of study pose challenges also. It is incumbent that specific strategies are initiated to address these challenges. In the case of the EMU/GVSU partnership, EMU faculty travel to GVSU to conduct the student admission interviews with the GVSU faculty. This provides an opportunity to build relationships among the joint faculty and encourage "buy-in" for both faculties relative to the selection of students for the doctoral program. In addition, the EMU graduate school, in concert with the GVSU graduate school, initiated a university-wide in-service meeting for GVSU faculty interested in participating on doctoral dissertation committees.

Last and of major importance is breaking down bureaucratic/structural barriers for students, i.e. admission to both institutions, registration for courses, recognition of

student doctoral status within the institutions and transfer credit processes and procedures. Each of these barriers needs to be addressed and seamless processes put into place that insures productive movement within and between the partnership institutions.

Summary

As economic indicators continue to signal tough times ahead, higher education institutions are also likely to continue to face further belt tightening. The familiar mantra of "doing more with less" will guide university policy makers into the next fiscal year and beyond. For higher education institutions this means operating more efficiently, the likely elimination of costly special programs, and a reduction in the number of tenure stream full-time faculty. It will also require that institutions look for opportunities to collaborate through inter-institutional partnerships that will provide creative ways to continue to address program needs in high demand fields, while at the same time doing so within existing resources.

The EMU/GVSU Cooperative doctoral program in educational leadership is designed to maximize existing resources within two regional state universities, avoiding costly duplication of programs, while serving student needs in a high demand area. Residual benefits include inter-institutional collaboration between faculty as well as increased benefits to students who have access to a wider range of faculty expertise and institutional facilities and resources, in an era of severe fiscal constraint, such inter-institutional partnerships simply make sense.

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Lisabeth S. Margulus	Lisabeth S. Margulus / Asst. Professor / Dr.	
Organization/Address:	Telephone: (616) 949-0768	Fax: (616) 331-6515
Grand Valley State University 401 W. Fulton St. Grand Rapids, MI 49504-6431	E-mail Address: margulul@gvsu.edu	Date: 10/2/03

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